Recommended Plants Most Beneficial to Honeybees and Other Pollinators with Top Sources of Pollen and Nectar

A healthy, diverse landscape benefits the environment vital to humans, pollinators, birds and other wildlife.

Often, plants that provide the best forage can sometimes be considered invasive, messy, unremarkable, or not the most desirable in terms of their quality as a specimen plant, particularly in residential settings. It is, therefore, critically vital to remember how important these plants actually are to the overall ecosystem, and to thoroughly investigate plant materials prior to purchase to insure compatibility with your planting zone, design, space, soils, and sun exposure.

Although there are *thousands* of potential plants that can be used to benefit pollinators, the following short list offers a higher level of pollen and or nectar, through multiple seasons and habitats (trees, shrubs, perennials) and have been observed to be *plants of choice* by pollinators.

**Trees:** Generally full sun.

Tilia Americana (American Linden) June, an excellent street tree, incredible fragrant bloom, important

Tilia cordata (Little leaf linden) June, excellent street tree, important forage tree

Robinia pseudoacacia (Black Locust) May, good for edge of larger properties

Liriodendron tulipfera (tulip poplar) May, large tree

Acer Saccharum (sugar maple) Feb-March, critical early forage

Evodia danielii (tetradium danielii) (Bee Bee Tree) July, considered invasive, the *best vital late forage tree*

Franklinia alatamaha (Ben Franklin’s Tree)(July) Small tree, aristocratic, specimen

Oxydendrum aboreums (sourwood) July, excellent native, specimen tree

Cornus mas (cornelian cherry) (March), small tree, critical early forage for pollen/nectar

**Understory and large shrubs:**

Amelanchiar laevis (Serviceberry) (April-May) part sun

Aesculus parviflora (dwarf horse chestnut, buckeye) (July) part sun-part shade

Heptacodium (Seven Son flower) (Sept) china, excellent late season forage, underused, sun-pt. sun

Rhus Chinensis (Chinese sumac) (Sept) Lg. deciduous shrub, very important late season forage. Sun.

**Shrubs:**

Hydrangea paniculata (pee gee hydrangea) (Sept) full sun, bumblebees love it.

Hydrangea Quercifolia (oakleaf hydrangea) (June) part shade, a honeybee favorite

Callicarpa dichotoma (purple beauty berry) (June) wider spread, beautiful, sun-part sun

Ilex verticillata (winter berry) (June) sun

Clethra alnifolia (sweet pepperbush) (July) part sun-sun

Ilex glabra (inkberry) (July) Part sun

Itea virginica (Sweetspire) (June) Fragrant white flowers for 8-12 days.

Caryopteris clandonensis and incana (bluebeard) (Aug) Excellent small shrub. Sun, important

Calluna Vulgaris (heather) (August), full sun or it flops over

Sarcacocca hookeriana (sweet box) (Feb-Mar), evergreen ground cover, sweetly fragrant, part shade

Mahonia bealei (leatherleaf mahonia) (Feb-Mar), evergreen shrub, shade to part shade

Spirea Bumalda, Magic Carpet (July) overall nice small shrub

Poncirus trifoliate (hardy orange) (May) large scythe-like thorns, interesting plant

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**Recommended Plants,** continued

**Perennials:** There are **so** many great perennial plants, here are just a few of the best:

Alliums (ornamental onion) bulbs, various bloom times through season, excellent forage, very important

Note: Most native and some non-native bulbs are critically important forage. See My Bulb list.

Asters, many types (Sept-October) very important

Anemone ‘Honorine Jobert’ (Oct)

Asclepias (milkweed) (June-July-Aug) tuberosa, incarnate, syriaca, important, use them all

Agastache (hyssop) (July-Aug) many cultivars, use them all, 21 native to N America, very important

Chrysanthemum rubellum (October-November)

Chrysanthemum pacificum (now called Ajania) (Oct-Nov) great silver foliage, compact, important

White dutch clover (June) seeds are inexpensive and can be cast, liberally, into untreated lawns, important

Eupatorium Gateway (Joe Pye Weed) (July) one of many, excellent large perennial, important

Echinacea purpurea (coneflower) (June)

Hardy geranium (cranesbill) (June) Johnson Blue, Magnificum

Hellebores (Lenten Rose) (Jan-Feb-Mar) great evergreen groundcover, pt shade, many types, important

Helianthus maximilliani (maximillan sunflower) (October) important late season pollen and nectar source

Nepeta Walkers Low (catmint) (June) important

Rudbeckia (black eyed Susan) (July)

Salvia (sage) (May-October) Such an important plant for pollen and nectar, see some of many types:

Salvia coccinea (texas sage) (Oct) white flowers, pollen and higher nectar

Salvia farinacea ‘victoria white’ or ‘blue’)(July) high nectar source

Salvia guarantica (July-frost) deep blue flowers, high nectar/pollen source

Salvia indigo spires (Sept) dark purple blooms

Salvia involucrate (rosyleaf sage) (Sept) purple red, 2’ tall, 2-3 weeks

Salvia leucantha (Mexican bush sage) (Oct) white/purple flowers, high forage, 3-4 weeks

Salvia officinalis (May) sub-shrubby plant, blue flowers, 2-3 weeks

Salvia nemorosa (June) violet blue flowers, blooms 2-3 weeks

Caradonna, darker blue stems, dead-heading helps longer bloom period

East Friesland (Ostfriesland) deep violet clue, June-September

May Night (Mainacht) dark blue-violet flowers (May-June)

Snow Hill, bloom 4-6 weeks

Salvia splendens Van Houttei (Scarlet Sage) (Oct) dark red, 4-5 weeks

Sedum Spectabile (Stonecrop) several cultivars, not good in moist or heavy soils, important

Solidago rugosa ‘fireworks’ (goldenrod) (October) critical late season forage, very important

Perovskia (Russian sage) (Aug)

Polygonum aubertii (silver lace vine) (Sept) good for walls or fence

Pycnanthemum (mountain mint) (July-Aug) esp. Hoary Mountain Mint, important

Verbascum phlomoides (mullein) (June) lovely architectural tall plant

Veronica spicata (speedwell) (June)

Vernonia altissima (ironweed) (Aug)

Veronicastrum virginicum (culvers root) (Aug)

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**Recommended Plants,** continued

**Annuals:** Take caution, as many annuals are greenhouse grown and treated with neonicotinoids, fungicides, and growth regulators, *especially hanging baskets* and poinsettias. Look for 4-6” pots. The larger the pot, the more likelihood of treatment. Ask pointed questions of suppliers. All require full sun.

Cleome (spider lily)

Zinnias

All herbs are excellent forage

Nasturtium

California blue sage (Salvia guarantica is often an annual here in Md)

**Hybrids:** It is becoming increasingly apparent that some of the more recent cultivars of original plants are not only developing insecticide resistance and vitality issues, but provide a decreased quality of forage for pollinators. When you think of highly hybridized plants that are inferior, think of tasteless, colorless greenhouse tomatoes. Generally, the more fancy the *cultivar* (fancier colors, double flowers), the more likely it is that the plants are less, to not beneficial to pollinators. Whenever possible, think native plants, but there are a few excellent non-natives to consider also.

**Comment on Camellias:**  These beautiful, evergreen, ***winter blooming***, part shade to part sun plants provide critical winter forage for honeybees and other pollinators. But because of being treated extensively with neonicotinoids during cultivation, these plants are rendered useless and dangerous to pollinators as the flowers will remain toxic for 2-3 years or more after planting. This important plant and **many** others are therefore rendered dangerous to pollinators and you can help by asking questions of your suppliers and demanding that use of these types of systemic pesticides be discontinued.

**Additionally**: If you have space, all berry plants, blueberry, raspberry, gooseberry, blackberry, etc., are the VERY BEST forage plants and being food plants, are generally not chemically treated by growers. Full sun.

**Maintenance:** For an easier time maintaining your perennial plants, consider books like The Well-Tended Perennial Garden, Planting and Pruning Techniques by Tracy DiSabato-Aust, which provides helpful instruction as to how to dead-head and cut back, and manage your perennials and pollinator plantings.

**Last word**: During my 27 years in the business of all types of plant material, I became aware that English ivy had become an invasive scourge. As ivy vines grow up trees, it loosens the bark, exposing the cadmium layer, the living part of the tree, to invasion by insects and pathogens, leading to premature death. I was astonished to see landscape architects specifying ivy as underplantings of trees on building sites, landscapers using it as ground covers on expensive landscape installations and seeing ivy sold by wholesale nurseries. I regularly nagged them to stop selling it. After becoming a beekeeper and learning about the significant decline of honeybees and other pollinators, I was surprised to discover that English ivy (hedera helix) is one of the **most** significant and important late season forage plants for pollinators. Ivy doesn’t flower until it becomes more than 9’ high on trees, but when the large bracts of this flower bursts into bloom in September, the trees become an amazing riot of bees and pollinators of all types. This last big burst of nectar and pollen helps honeybees to make the honey that they need to make it through the winter, and beekeepers who have such ivy growth near their apiaries experience greater success at getting their bees through the winter. I still have grave misgivings about the sale of ivy, as it is almost indestructible, but I believe that an informed public is better able to make informed decisions. The idea that bees may disappear in the next decade or two is enough for me to consider the value of ivy in (some) of our trees. Food for thought.

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